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CHAPTER 10

# South African Freedom Fighter Amilcar Cabral: Pedagogue of the Revolution

*Paulo Freire*
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## Introduction

I would like, from the outset of our conversation, to make a point or two more or less clear. In the first place, I feel great satisfaction at being here today. Since my return from exile in 1980, this is the first time, or rather

This chapter by Paulo Freire (1921–1997) is a transcription of a lecture that Paulo Freire gave on November 8, 1985 at the School of Education at the University of Brasilia (UNB), and it was originally recorded, transcribed, and organized in Portuguese by Professor Venicio Arthur Lima. It has never been published in English. Its publication in this book has been made possible by the generosity of Professor Nita Freire, the late Paulo Freire's wife and the executor of the Paulo Freire estate, for which I am eternally grateful. In addition, we would like to extend a special thanks to Alex Oliveira for his technical assistance with this translation.

Paulo Freire: Deceased.

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the second, I have come to the University of Brasilia for a meeting of the Board, but it is the first time I have come, for a conversation such as this one, legally, without any camouflage. Venicio de Lima brought me here in 1981, I believe, along with others, but I came without anyone's knowledge, went into some mysterious room because I was simply forbidden. So, I would like to say how pleased I am to be here with you this morning. Now, the second point I want to stress is that by accepting the invitation to come here to have a conversation about Amilcar Cabral,[1] I do not want to give the impression that I consider myself an expert in his work, thought, or practice.

Obviously, I have been reflecting on Amilcar Cabral's thinking; if I did not know anything about Cabral, it would be difficult to explain why I am here having a conversation about him, as that would be a profoundly immoral act, from an intellectual point of view. However, I want to insist from the beginning that I do not consider myself an expert, though I wish I had become an expert, on Cabral, at least not with the superficiality with which some people, at times, think themselves experts of particular kinds of issues.

I had a great dream of developing a project, a biography of the praxis of Amilcar; in a way I have felt frustrated to this day for not having been able to do it. However, before people start to raise questions, I would first like to make a few comments.

I did not know Amilcar Cabral in person, but I got to know him through the references that people made about him and his involvement in the African struggle against colonialism. It seems to me that it was impossible to even comment on, or speak about, the liberation movements in Africa, above all in the so-called Africas of Portuguese Expression[2] (which to me is more an expression of a Portuguese colonialist stance than that phrase is true), without paying attention to Amilcar Cabral. I always used to say that I did not recognize different Africas, a Portuguese one, a French one, an English one. To me, colonialism imposed itself upon Africa, but without ever having the capacity to turn

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it into Africas of this or that expression. Amilcar Cabral was involved at the gestation of all of the liberation movements in the former Portuguese colonies since the time when he was still young and studying in Lisbon.

Regrettably, I was never able to meet with him in person. That is one of my greatest frustrations; I wish I had gotten to know him personally. However, I do know his work, and I have dedicated myself to studying them after the liberation of Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, and the other countries. I was invited by the Guinea-Bissau government, along with a team I worked with at the time in Geneva, to make a contribution to the people of Guinea-Bissau, and of Cape Verde, as well. Thus, we committed ourselves to develop a serious study of what we encountered in the works of Amilcar Cabral. I remember that I read two volumes of Amilcar's work that were translated into French and only much later was I able to obtain the original text published in Lisbon. I used to read Amilcar page-by-page, word-by-word, making my personal notes, and when our team from the Institute of Cultural Action (Idac) and I went to Guinea-Bissau, we started to engage in conversations with people, from all over Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, who fought side by side with Amilcar. Based on those conversations, we began to realize, and then to verify, through those testimonials, the enormous coherence that existed between what we read in Amilcar Cabral's writing and what the people were telling us about him. They were youthful people, young people, guerrilla fighters who had fought in the fields and in the jungles alongside Amilcar. Reading Amilcar's work, knowing his personality, and understanding him as a great revolutionary were things that fascinated me, and they completely fascinate me even today. And the idea of the book was born there, from those encounters with the works of Amilcar Cabral and the effects of his work in practice, even with the distance, a great one that existed at times, between what he wrote and what he did in the process of liberation. The putting into practice of his work after the change, after the liberation, does not in any way diminish, to me, the validity of Cabral's political project. Hence, the dream of doing a study was born there, a sort of biography of Cabral's praxis. I actually went as far as naming the book that I wished to write, but was not able to; the title would have been, *Amilcar Cabral, Pedagogue of the Revolution*. In this very title, I established a difference between being a "*pedagogue of the revolution*" and being a "*revolutionary pedagogue*." I think that there is a slight difference, but that does not or should not diminish in any way what it is to be a "*revolutionary pedagogue*." Still, there is a slight difference, but that does not or should not

diminish in any way what it is to be a "*revolutionary pedagogue*." There was a difference that I found to be fundamental: Amilcar to me was a "*pedagogue of the revolution*." I mean, he perfectly embodied the dream of the liberation of his people and the political and pedagogical procedures to realize that dream. I remember, as well, that one of the paths I thought of for carrying out my project on Amilcar was precisely that of listening, to a maximum extent, to the people that had fought alongside him, within Guinea-Bissau, in Cape Verde, and later in other African countries, and later still, to people outside Africa. I went as far as having a conversation with the PAIGC (African Party for Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde Independence) leadership, to whom I put my proposal, my project.

I remember I said that, as an intellectual, I felt like a militant, and that the difference between me and some other intellectual was that a different intellectual might conduct very serious research, as a matter of fact, and then write the book without seeking the PAIGC party's permission, or even without engaging in the PAIGC party's debate. But that was not my position. In case the party said yes, I would then get to work and, should I someday get to the completion of what I dreamed to accomplish, I would offer up to the party the original manuscripts before publishing them, so that they could read them and then summon me to debate with me the points the party did not agree with. With a deep sense of loyalty, I would say, "If the PAIGC can convince me of any error on my part, I will remove it, if they do not, I won't." But what I want to make very clear is my political position, and not merely the position of a detached intellectual just interested in the work of a great leader, as was Amilcar Cabral. The party agreed to the project and did not pose any obstacles. I would go further to say that once the text was approved I would gift it to the party, and that I would just work with the publishers toward getting it published, but that the party would retain full ownership rights.

I started work, and then I remembered something regrettable, I had recorded approximately ten interviews in Guinea-Bissau, and they were all lost, all of those cassettes, in our move from Geneva to Brazil. I remember vividly that I had excellent interviews, one of which was with a Cape Verdean, Julinho Carvalho, who is today in Cape Verde and was Armed Forces commissioner in Guinea-Bissau prior to the rupture. I spoke a great deal with that man, who was an extraordinary human being and a great military strategist. I had a fantastic interview with him, we recorded close to two hours, speaking of the political vision, the military vision, which we can term here without any fear, Amilcar Cabral's humanist

vision, without provisioning the humanist objective with any sappy connotation: a humanist vision in the sense of the "radicality of the humane" in him or the sense of the radicalness with which we refer to what is human in him. He then told me of events such as the one I am going to relate here:

One day, he said, a team of commanders, of which he was a member, organized and carried out an armed action aimed at destroying the main Portuguese military base, an irreparable loss for the colonialist forces. In that Portuguese defeat, envisioned in the commanders' planning, the colonialist army would hardly manage to survive. The commander said that they took the plan to Amilcar, that he examined it, discussed it for two hours, and that when he was done, at a given point, he asked the commanders,

> "What about the social cost of putting this plan into practice? Militarily, I have no doubt that it will work. What I want to know is: if we put this in plan into practice what will this cost?"
>
> "Well, we will liquidate the Portuguese troops one hundred percent, and we will lose fifty percent of ours," replied one of the commanders.
>
> "It is too costly to be put into practice."

And, then, Amilcar said something to them that was impressive to me:

> "Listen you have created this plan, a project of war, a project of struggle without paying attention to the fact that we are on the side of history, and that history is on our side. It is the Portuguese that are the ones against history. Therefore, there is nothing wrong if we just delay that ultimate moment of throwing the last shovel of dirt over the colonialist grave and bury colonialism, without losing so many people." And he concluded,
>
> "Our aim is to expose and expel the colonialists and not necessarily to kill them. In order to drive them out, we must kill some, and die."

Notice that what Amilcar states is, contrary to what we might think, very normal, since I could never accept the idea that a revolutionary being is someone who just wants violence, and just wants to kill. That is absurd because that is not what a revolutionary is, that is pathology. Therefore, it is not an attribute of a revolutionary to want to kill people. But that concern on Amilcar's part, told to me by that commander, was an enduring concern present in the struggles and in the analyses he provided in

his writings—in fact, his writings, for the most part, need to be seen as an outcome of those extraordinary seminars, like his evaluations of the armed conflict, and so on, many of which were conducted in the middle of the jungle.

While talking to another young man who worked in Guinea-Bissau as a sort of district supervisor in the area of education, I asked,

> "What impressed you the most in your experience with Amilcar?"
>
> "Comrade Paulo Freire, what impressed me the most about Comrade Cabral was his capacity to know beyond his immediate surroundings and to imagine the not yet." "What might that be?" I asked.
>
> "I think, do I not, Comrade?"
>
> "But of course you think."
>
> "Tell me now, I am not able to think six-hundred meters beyond myself. Comrade Cabral would think six years ahead of himself." "Explain that," I said.
>
> "Once we were in the frontline of battle, in a certain war zone, after a week of taking strong punishment from 'TuGa'[3] Portuguese aviation, and Comrade Cabral arrived for an inspection and studies visit …"

That is what I am referring to here as the seminars that he used to hold in the jungles as an assessment of the armed conflicts or an evaluation of the praxis. Deep down, Amilcar was an extraordinary theorist, and for that reason he was an excellent practitioner. He, then, brought the crowd to one of those seminars. I keep imagining one of those marvelous clearings we can find in the African bushes, in the jungles. And sitting there, in an African way, under the shelter of the huge trees, and Amilcar discussed and talked about how he valued the process of struggle, and in a moment, he suddenly said,

> "I need to withdraw two hundred of you from the battlefront, to send to a different battlefront. I need two hundred of you to send to Guinea-Conakry, to the Capacitation Institute, in order to train and to educate all two hundred and then bring them back to the interior of the country, to the liberated zones, in order to work as teachers."

Then, the young man looks at me and speaks again. Notice how very immediate his reasoning is, and how very similar it is to some of our reasoning in Brazil and Latin America.

> "How is it that I, who had a rifle in my hands, seeing my comrade falling dead by my side, the 'TuGas' killing us, how was I to think, at that moment, that there might be the possibility for two hundred of us to leave the battlefront to go to school?"

So my reply was the following, "But, Comrade Amilcar, this business of education can wait for when we have kicked the 'TuGas' out; then, we can think about education; we can be educated and trained. I thought that you, Comrade Cabral, were bringing another two hundred fighters here, not taking two hundred away from here."

And Cabral replied,

> "And why do you think that is not right?"
>
> "Because we cannot lose the war," said the young man.
>
> "But it is precisely so that we will not lose the war that I need two hundred of you," said Cabral.

That is a beautiful dialogue. This is something extraordinary to me! And the young man continued not to believe and, above all, not to understand.

Incidentally, making a comment, there is something built into this dialogue that says a great deal about the *pedagogue of the revolution*. This is, in fact, what I call *democratic substantiveness*, which does not mean being a social democrat. We must put an end to this kind of revisionism that claims that just because someone talks about democracy that it immediately makes them an individual for social democracy, or a spontaneistic revisionist, or a wimp, or a lot of other such things. We must put an end to the habitual notion that there can only be rigor under authoritarianism. It is necessary for those who say so to own up to their authoritarianism rather than transfer it to others.

It seems to me, then, that the fact of that young man's dialogue with Cabral shows that he indeed held Cabral as a great leader, may no one think otherwise, because he is still the great present leader, not a magically present one or mythically so. Well, obviously, at that moment, he knew that Cabral was the leader, but the leader did not just *speak to* the ones he

led, because he actually *spoke with* them, in addition to speaking *to them*. I would like to make another parenthesis to say that it is fundamental to me that for a radical democratic revolutionary leadership the leadership *speaks to* the ones led. However, what is not possible is for that leadership to stop *speaking with*, and to me there is only one way to *speak to* the ones who are being led without speaking *against* them, and that is to *speak with* them as well. It is only through *speaking with* that one can be legitimized at certain necessary moments when one might run the risk of falling into spontaneity; it is only by *speaking with* that one can, at certain times, legitimize one's right to *speak to*.

That was something Amilcar did in an extraordinary manner; the authoritarian always *speaks to* someone; the spontaneistic thinks that they can never *speak to* and must always *speak with*. To me, those are two false positions, and I would like to make them clear here. My position is that of someone who *speaks to* because he *speaks with*. And Amilcar did so.

At one point in his narrative, the young man then says that Amilcar looked at everyone and said the following,

> "My friends, my fellow comrades, this war will not be won by some of my generation, who will escape; it will not be won by some of your generation, who will escape; rather, it will be won by the generation that is coming up."

Notice what vision Cabral has; this is what I call historic sensibility, what exuded from his pore, that is, the capacity for *reading the world* and not just for *reading texts*. Those who lose themselves in reading only dichotomized texts of the world and the context of these texts constantly fall flat on their faces. The only way to avoid falling on their faces is to take over their own scholarship and then to take care of their own academy. And then Amilcar said,

> "What happens is that, in five or six years, when this now younger generation of little ones out there comes upon the moment of definitive struggle, they will need to use war instruments that are not the ones you are using, war instruments requiring mathematical knowledge that you did not and do not have, scientific knowledge, that the next generation will need. And what we need now is precisely to take two hundred of you to go to be educated, so that you can return and educate and train the others here."

The young man looks at me and says,

> "Comrade Paulo, I then went to Guinea-Conakry. I confess to you, Sir that I went without much understanding, but I went. I went to school, educated myself, and returned. Here, I educated ranks of them, ranks indeed of the generation that had to win, and I saw students who studied with me shooting down "TuGa" planes with rockets, those soviet rockets."

And he went on,

> "Comrade, Paulo Freire, that is why at the beginning I told you, Sir, that I am able to think six-hundred meters around myself, and that Comrade Cabral could think six years ahead of himself."

I still remember that when he told me about this, I took advantage of that situation to segue into talking about my understanding of prophetism. To me, Comrade Cabral was a prophet, not on account of being a bearded madman, or as ugly as a "Beato Salu."[4] There is a misconception, whereby, when they hear mention of a prophet, many people conjure up thoughts of a crazy person, a mad, dirty person who is always making speeches. Not so! A prophet or a prophetisa is a man or woman who lives so intensely today, and because of that they can figure out tomorrow. I deliberately used the words "to figure out" to somewhat recognize the task to "figure out" as in epistemology. I think knowing is not just guessing. However, it does go figuring out, or intuition, if you want to be more polite. A prophet is exactly the person that is not crazy in the least but rather has a deep rooting in today, as he/she fights to transform it. And it is precisely this praxis that is completely immersed in today that allows him/her to predict, figure out, and foresee the future because he/she knows quite well that you actually make the future based on the things that you transform today.

There is no such thing as a predestined future out there waiting for the people who will come along to claim it in a future time. No, we build the future in the process of a radical transformation of today. And that is what Cabral, this man capable of thinking six years ahead of himself, accomplished.

The testimonials I collected in Guinea-Bissau were, more or less, fifteen to sixteen hours of recordings, all taken from different figures, comrades who fought with rifles, who had commanding duties, comrades who were commissioners or ministers at the time of the interviews. Prime Minister Chico Terra also granted me an extensive interview, and he died in

an accident shortly thereafter. All of the testimonials emphasized Cabral's capacity: first, of his ability at anticipating the future; second, they stressed his belief of *speaking with* the people; third, his extraordinary competence paired with historical sensibility, and they mentioned his qualities that are absolutely indispensable for scientific knowledge, in addition to his sensibility for the objective, the concrete, and for objectivity. The interviews also highlighted his deep respect of common sense and to "I think it is" statements, which characterizes the uncertainty of popular wisdom. Cabral really had a profound respect for popular wisdom/knowledge.

I remember, for example, that in one of his texts, where he talked about his assessments of the struggles, he discussed with a group of guerrillas and freedom fighters about their superstition of "cri-cri"[5] power and the belief in the power of the amulets, the "bentinhos," and such things, talismans and other such charms were called "mezinhos." And one fellow argued, convinced that the amulet would cause the enemy's bullet to ricochet, veer off to a side, not hit a man. Cabral listens to that with the wisdom of a political anthropologist and then says, "I would like to say to all comrades that what defends us from the enemy's bullet is whether we know or do not know how to fight." It is whether one has, I would now add, or does not have a certain competence for the struggle that one can only gain in the struggle, and the mezinhos, the lucky charms do not do that. Then, Cabral says, "But the party respects; it respects the belief, the conviction that that is embodied in our culture."

Those were the dimensions of culture that Cabral termed *feebleness* of culture, and such feebleness lay, from the standpoint of his analysis, precisely within the relations between human beings and the natural world. And Cabral defended and responded to this so beautifully, and said that it was not a matter here of reaching for a shovel of dirt under which to bury that magical understanding of the real. It was not about people remaining at that level of feebleness, but rather about starting out from it so as to reach toward overcoming it.

On a political and pedagogical level, that is also what I have been saying since the fifties; nevertheless, there are those critics of mine in this country who say what Freire defends is that educators should remain at the learner's level. That is something incredible. I have never used the verb *remain*, because that would be absurd; I have always used the verb to *start out*. I mean *starting out* from the understanding of the world held by the learner, or held by masses of people, and to *start out* from, unless a dictionary might provide me a contrary view, means to *depart*

*from* a certain point toward another. Therefore, there exists within the verb to *start out* a connotation of movement, and another of intentionality, and another of directivity. That is why education is indeed directive; it is a *starting out from*.

Well, then, in Cabral, one can see this in an extraordinary way. So he concluded his speech in what must have been a beautiful afternoon in a Guinea-Bissau jungle, "However, I have no doubt that our children's children will praise the PAIGC for having known how to fight, but they will say with a smile: our parents believed in bizarre things, strange things."

Now, let us notice again how marvelous this is! It is in these statements that Cabral affirms himself as a *pedagogue of revolution*. You see, it would be absurd, for example, if some day children said to parents, "You are idiots, and I cannot understand how you can still be alive." However, at the same time, it would also be absurd to make concessions to the feebleness of culture itself; such concessions were not an option. Therefore, the way to deal with it is to talk openly about this feebleness of culture while not stigmatizing it. That Cabral did in everything.

Another testimonial, by a woman who held a very high-up, very important post in the Ministry of Education, also impressed me a lot. She told me that one day Cabral brought together the whole directors' team in Guinea-Conakry, where liberation from French colonialism came before Guinea-Bissau's liberation. There, the PAIGC had a training center (Capacitation Center), and one day, she went on to tell me, in a large meeting for evaluating the process for the struggle for freedom, when he seemed to be adjourning the meeting, Cabral fixed his gaze upon the ceiling of the room. Then he said, "Now, let me think." He then started to speak to himself. He described what Guinea-Bissau would be like, what Cape Verde would be like, after the independence. He went so far as touching on administrative details, speaking about ministries, about departments, which were called commissions. He described and profiled the country as it stepped out of the colonialist muck and constituted itself within the continuation of the struggle for freedom and at the same time consolidating the struggle for liberation.

At one point he stops and looks at the whole group, and one of the team members says, "Comrade Cabral, but is that a dream?"

The problem was that Cabral was pointing out that the dream was quite near.

She then told me that Cabral gave one of those answers that stuck with me,

> "Yes, yes, it is a 'dream.' But there is no revolution if you do not dream. You cannot be a revolutionary without dreaming, the real issue is that you have to know how to fight to make your dreams come true."

Notice how this has to do with Cabral's prophetic dimension, and with a very lucid, very clear awareness he possessed as to the unbreakable relationship between theory and practice, which he never dichotomized. However, he also never made a speech that was purely theoretical, because it would have made the comprehension of the content difficult for his fellow comrades in war and in the struggle.

In Cabral, I learned a great many things, and when I say *in* Cabral, I also mean *with* Cabral. I learned many things, and I confirmed other things I already suspected, but I learned one thing that is a necessity for the progressive educator and for the revolutionary educator. I make a distinction between the two: For me, a progressive educator is one who works within the bourgeois classed society such as ours, and whose dream goes beyond just making schools better, which needs to be done. And goes beyond because what he/she indeed dreams of is the radical transformation of a bourgeois classed society into a socialist society. For me that is a progressive educator. Whereas a revolutionary educator, in my view, is one who already finds himself/herself already situated at a much more advanced level both socially and historically within a society in process.

But, returning to what I was saying, one thing I learned with him in a big way was how a progressive educator needs to make himself simple, without ever becoming simplistic. That to me is fantastic; pick up Cabral's writings and notice how really simple they are, but not simplistic. Simplistic, to me, is a fantastic expression, a powerful one, of elitism; it is even worse than populism but has a lot in common with certain populist orientations. In other words, deep down the simplistic are authoritarian. The simplistic is one who says, "How can I talk to these people who are not capable of understanding me?" He, then, speaks in half-truths, quarter-truths, in fact through mere fragments of truth. In Cabral, we can see the opposite of that, and what he does is talk about the concrete in very serious but simple ways.

I have a picture of Cabral at my house, the only one I ever saw where he stands with a rifle. They told me in Guinea-Bissau that he was horrified by that photo because of one of Cabral's few negative attributes. Apparently, he was not crazy about his short height; I don't know to what

extent that was true, but they say he was short and that he very much disliked his height, especially when carrying a rifle. In this photo, you can actually notice how short he really was when comparing his height with the size of the rifle.

On account of this business about Cabral's height, I will actually allow myself the right to be prosaic and quote one of those clichés:

"Cabral was enormous inside."

I am reminded, though, of one of those testimonials, and if I were an artist I would be able to reproduce the image I have in my memory of what I did not see. The encounter is of the meeting of Amilcar Cabral and Che Guevara in the jungle. As I was told by the person who gave that testimonial, the two of them stood there, one before the other, profoundly attracted to one another. They then embraced. That moment when these two enormous men, one short and the other big, met may possibly have been the only time when Cabral was not bothered by his physical size. It was as if he was completed physically by what was abundant in the physicality of Guevara. The truth is they both complemented one another with regard to their political understanding of the struggle.

It is no coincidence that Guevara did not hesitate in the least to speak about love, with respect to the Revolution, "While running the risk of seeming ridiculous, I must say that there is no revolution without love." And then there is that other beautiful quote from Guevara about tenderness, "One must harden without ever losing one's tenderness."[6] It is not by accident that he would say that, and Cabral would say similar things. Deep down, those men represented to me two of the greatest expressions of the twentieth century. Guevara was also a *pedagogue of revolution* rather than just a *revolutionary educator*, and he had the same popular sensibility, without being a populist. He got the chills as well before speaking before the people, the masses, and he knew what "the people" meant. Yet, Amilcar did not have any fear to speak in front of the people. He knew what it meant to meet "ordinary people."

### *The Historic Process in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, with Their Differences, in Search of Unity*

One day, early on in my visits to Cape Verde and to Guinea-Bissau, I asked one of the ministers whether it would be possible for some form

of political, cultural, and economic solidarity to exist, in fact, among the "five sister-nations," while preserving each country's administrative and political autonomy. After all, it seemed to me that there were certain historical and cultural rifts between the *two* societies, and thus it seemed to me difficult to set those aside so as to form one single block. The very forms of colonizing Portugal adopted were the cause of one such rift, the colonizing procedures employed in Cape Verde and in Guinea-Bissau were distinct procedures. The impression I have is that the colonizer chose the Cape Verde archipelago as a location for the production of assimilated individuals, for the most part. That was the political dream of the Portuguese, which did not work. Such was the policy with regard to the meztico populations (an intricate combination of interracial relationships), the mixed-race, lighter-skinned, rather than darker-skinned, population of Cape Verde. There an intellectuality was formed that had a chance not afforded other meztico communities.

Portugal had planned to garner their own ranks from Cape Verde, which they did, as necessary intermediaries to the colonial administration in the other colonies, or in the so-called provinces. That took place over a long period, and this single fact alone marked one distinction with respect to the other colonies. Thus, I could see, for example, a greater ease, and I am not sure that is the word, a greater degree of applicability at the time of Cabral's proposals in Cape Verde than in Guinea-Bissau. For instance, there seemed to be greater coherence between what was said and what was done. I found that somewhat difficult; there was a certain jealousy, without wanting to discuss here whether it was right or not, on the part of those in Guinea-Bissau, and that aspect was exploited, from the standpoint of the right, with respect to the Cape Verdeans.

I find it to be absurd, linguistically speaking, and indeed unfeasible, to teach Portuguese to the popular masses in Guinea-Bissau. It is a political unfeasibility, but at times that unfeasibility is not political. Imagine, if you would, that Brazil had gone into a revolution, were living a revolution, and that we approached the Brazilian rural workers, the laborers, the factory workers to say the following, "You see, in order for our revolution to fly, we are just going to have to educate in the Spanish language now; it is the same thing." But I remember that in my first consultation with Mário Cabral; in my first letter in *Cartas a Guiné-Bissau* I make reference to this problem.

When we arrived in Guinea-Bissau, I did put that issue to the ministry's teams, and they told me that it was not so, that there was bilingualism,

to a great extent, in Cape Verde, for example. "There, you can educate in the Portuguese language without violence (to the culture)." I would not say that it was entirely without violating the culture; it was a lesser violation perhaps, but it could be done. More so in São Tomé. However, in Guinea-Bissau, in Angola, and in Mozambique it would be a major violation.

Mozambique and Angola are in a worse situation than Cape Verde or Guinea-Bissau. In Angola and Mozambique, the situation is dramatic because they did not develop, and historic and social conditions did not allow for the development of a language such as Creole. A Creole did not develop in Angola and Mozambique; what we have in those countries are the national ethno-cultural languages of the different groups of people. There are some thirty languages. … I could understand such difficulties.

Politically, neither the MPLA (Popular Movement for Angola Liberation) nor the Frelimo (Mozambique Liberation Front), for example, can approach the people of Angola and Mozambique and decree that one of those languages will be the national language. Doing so would be a disaster. Therefore, the only political solution available, as a result of linguistic nonviability, was to make the colonizer's language into the language for a task that is an impossible one: to educate children and youth in a foreign language. Let me read, here and now, from a letter[7] published in the book *Por uma Pedagogia da Pergunta*.

However, this language issue posed a problem, a great challenge that the revolutionary leaders had to face. Please note that, not meaning to be simplistic or a reductionist: In the process of independence, there may be, *broad brush*, two possibilities as to the political orientation to be implemented once the national group has risen to power. The first one would be, for example, while breaking with colonialism, falling, nonetheless, into neocolonialism, that is, a sweetened form of colonialism.

Furthermore, neocolonialism cuts down on expenses for the colonizer, who spends less and profits more, because maintaining a space occupied by colonial officials, a bureaucracy, is not necessarily needed. That bureaucracy is gradually replaced by a national one, at a lower cost. Within such neocolonialist stance, the colonizer's language continues to be absolutely fundamental. Thus, the colonizer goes to great lengths toward the preservation of that language as a power presence. The other political option is a fundamental rupture from the colonialist and a departure toward a type of society that is made independent.

Obviously, for nations in the process of building their autonomy, the issue of language is absolutely crucial. After all, the whole business of formal language is, first of all, an abstraction, and what is indeed concrete is language use. The whole business of the Portuguese language, linguistics, all that is an abstraction; what is concrete is the way the people speak, the people's discourses, which are class-based. A class-based discourse is subject to cultural class changes, to influences, and so on.

Now, consider that the problem of language use is that it is directly impacted by errors of culture and of class subjectivities. That is why one of the first measures taken by the colonizer is to seek to impose its language upon the colonized. It is fantastic how the colonized capriciously guard against it, "Let us make use of the language so as to make things easier." The colonized find defenses against the foreign occupier-language by speaking and maintaining their own language, termed by the colonizer strictly as a bastardized dialect. The colonized can do so because they become convinced that they have a moment of freedom when they express themselves in their own manner of being and of speaking, in their language. Well, that is why the language issue is so fundamental.

I remember that one of the measures taken by President Nyerere, who just stepped down in Tanzania, was to phase in the change from English to *Swahili*. In a given year, he overcame English in preschool; the following year or two years later, he overcame English in elementary and middle schools. They may possibly have gotten to college level by now.

Nyerere is another great African that I disagreed with from time to time, but to me, he is one of the great educators of the twentieth century, not only in Africa but also in the world. He is just not known in Brazil; he is better known in English-speaking countries. I talked with Nyerere a great deal about this issue of cultural identity, and he had the fascinating advantage of speaking both *Swahili* and English brilliantly. He spoke the English from Oxford English and the *Swahili* from Tanzania.

So this issue of language has to be a central, an essential concern in any political struggle process because the problem of language lies within any program of culture. There is a saying from Amílcar that I think is fantastic, "The struggle for liberation is a cultural fact and a factor of culture." So now you can see why language is a matter of culture. So for me this should be one of the starting points and should be seen as a concern.

Now, obviously you cannot think that this is easy. When I spoke with the minister, I used to say to him, "Look, we must win this fight, we must

win this war." We suggested bringing in a group of linguists with a great deal of knowledge of African languages. However, it is not easy to adopt the Creole language, for example, as the national language that mediates the cultural and political formation of its people. Where might one find the money and the technical, scientific competence needed to translate all the fundamental works that Guinea-Bissau has yet to produce, and that need to be read, studied? How can all that be put into Creole overnight, with what money, what time, and with what competence?

Revolution is not child's play: It is something very serious, and all those issues have to be thought through, including the language issue. When the time came to share our advice, I thought immediately that it was an impossible task. However, a little over a year after arriving there, I wrote a long letter to the minister, which I discussed above.[8] I did not publish it in *Cartas a Guiné-Bissau* for political reasons, as a matter of respect, and as a tactical issue. Later on, I ended up publishing it in a book coauthored with Antonio Faudez, *Por uma Pedagogia da Pergunta*.

What I sought to draw attention to is how, deep down, using the Portuguese language as the mediation-language in the political, ideological, scientific, and technical formative process of the former colonized is to use superstructure as a determining factor in the social class divisions within the very body of the revolution, and that is a paradox. I said to the minister, "Listen, what do you think is going to happen? Bilinguals? Pure bilinguals? Those bilinguals are just a few of the Portuguese bourgeoisie who live in the urban centers. Say, for example, you are wonderfully bilingual, possibly, but I know a Cape Verdean who doesn't even speak any Creole, he only speaks Portuguese."

Then I said to them, "Listen if these things continue this way, what is going to happen? One might say that, those governing this country twenty years from now will be you. And what will be the role and the participation of the great peasant masses of this country within process of national reconstruction and the creation of a real popular democracy? What role? Tell me where are the masses in this process? They will not play a role, precisely because you people will continue to select for power, through schooling. And obviously, when it comes to a choice between your child who is bi-lingual, and the child of a peasant or rural laborer, who is not bi-lingual, who only speaks Creole, their ethnic language, your child will pass the courses, especially if the evaluation criterion continues to be bathed within the Portuguese intellectualist frameworks."

What if the schools continue to evaluate a child's capacity for knowledge through the rote learning and memorization of geography and history, without considering in the evaluative process the child's ability to read the world that the non-Portuguese-speaking child has, the wisdom that child has gained as well, what if none of that is taken into account in the evaluation? What will happen, then, is that only bilinguals will be able to pass to the top of the class. At that point, I can tell who will be governing this country.

So I put forward two or three propositions in that aforementioned letter. For example, I provided an analysis of a brilliant experience that took place there regarding a community vegetable garden group that grew out of the literacy courses. When the literacy courses ended, the learning that the group came away with was the discovery of the value of collective work rather than ba-be-bi-bo-bu. Then I demonstrated from my analyses the importance of this, in one of the letters to them, in 1977.

The government then began to accept the changes and debate around that, much more openly than before, and I could actually understand the difficulty in doing so. One day the president himself told me, "Comrade Paulo Freire, among us we have those that do not accept Creole. They think that it is not a language but an ugly dialect. But obviously this is due to the fact of the penetration of a powerful dominant ideology; even after struggling as we have, one still ends up accepting the colonizer's profiling of one's culture, one's history, and one's self and therefore deeming one's own language too ugly and incompetent to express one's science, technology and art."

For example, in a previous book I claimed that there is no reason for the Portuguese, the German, and the French, just to mention those three forms of language expression, to resent having to use the English word *stress*. There is no way you can translate *stress* into those languages, you just have to say *stress*. After all, the problem with language evolution is that it is deeply linked to the development of productive forces of any society. I say one's process of technological and scientific development of one's productive forces, or one is not a good Marxist. Now, what happens is that North-American technological development added its own economic, technological, and political power to the previous tradition of power, which was exactly Britain's economic-political power over the word. The English language became a modern Latin, for the same plain reasons why Latin was the previous Latin. To claim that Creole does not have the same capacity to express its own science, technology, and art is

reactionary, it is nonsense, it is pure nonscientific ideology, because Creole is capable of expanding and developing like any other language. Which language is there today that does not have influences from the English language?

For me, the only slip on Cabral's part is precisely in this work of his that I have right here, when he says, "The greatest gift the 'TuGas' left was language." That was one of the rare instances of naiveté by Amilcar. I talked about that in Guinea-Bissau, in one of my interviews. I would tell people, "I cannot understand how an individual who was as rigorous as Cabral, and as cunning at the same time, could have said something like that." His own widow told me, "It is important to understand that text and the historic and social context in which he stated it."

This question is both fundamental and crucial today, and any analyst of Cabral needs to emphasize this. In any event, what they told me there was that, at the time when Cabral made that statement, some analysis was called for; the risk was emerging in the struggle of a certain sectarization that led Cape Verdeans and Guineans to oppose any Portuguese, to oppose the Portuguese culture, to oppose the Portuguese language, to oppose all things Portuguese. Cabral needed, then, to curb the risk of strengthening in that perspective, which, I agree, would have weakened the struggle itself.

There was, deep down, a certain naiveté there, because the issue for the colonized as regards the colonizing culture is not to negate it. I mean, it is to negate it ethically; it is not to say that there is nothing of value in it. In that, Cabral was most lucid.

No culture can be judged as absolutely bad or absolutely good. Cultures are necessarily different from one another. So the issue is how to take advantage of the positive deeds that the "TuGas" have done. They told me that it was in that context that Cabral said what he said. Therefore, it was a tactical statement. However, if I were Cabral's comrade and friend at that time, I would have told him the following: "Do not publish this Cabral; change it. Even with all tactical skills that you must have, you have other ways to avoid sectarização (divisions)." By saying what he said, he was admitting to something absolutely nonexistent, which was that language was purely a tool. Then, I do not believe it was simply a matter of tactics; I believe that, in this case, Amilcar was in error. But it is nice to find a doozie of an error in an individual as extraordinary as he.

### *The Engine of History*

In *Cartas a Guiné-Bissau*, at some point, perhaps out of sheer intuition, I state that Amilcar fought for a scientific understanding, but never a scientifistic one, of reality. In the second place, my impression, my conviction, is that Amilcar was a great distance away from positivist criteria. Amilcar was, to me, a very good Marxist, who undertook an *African reading of Marx*, not a German reading of Marx, nor a nineteenth century reading of Marx. He engaged in a twentieth century reading of Marxist Africa. It is for no other reason that, in the serious speech he gave in Havana, he rules out accepting the assertion that class struggle is the engine of history.[9] He negated that in Cuba, and he argues in his writing that it is not class struggle, properly speaking; he historically analyzes the emergence of classes from a technical, a Marxist, standpoint, and asserts that much more than class it is the mode of production that constitutes the engine of history. I have the impression as well that, from the Marxist point of view, when one speaks of class struggle, one possibly does not do so solely taking class to its most technical, most exact sense. Even prior to the historical emergence of social classes, there were conflicts; there were already struggles between contradictory interests, between dominant and dominated. But Cabral put it with great independence in Havana, saying that one of his reasons for rejecting class struggle as the engine of history is that he could not accept that Africa had had no history, before. He later poses two epistemological questions. One is this: What took place before the struggle, before the resistance of the classes, and what will there be afterward? Can it be that history will end? This second question seems even more serious to me: Could it be that with the socialist revolution in the world, with the suppression of antagonistic classes and so on, that history will end as well? Might the socialist revolution be a heralding of the end?

If it were, I would prefer that it was not. Indeed, what I really love is the history itself. And Cabral poses this question with great independence. But what I think is the following: Such an extraordinary man like Cabral should be studied next to another, to me, that extraordinary figure is Gramsci. I do not know if Amílcar studied Gramsci. He never mentions or makes reference to Gramsci, but not on account of being remiss. He truly did not read Gramsci. The works of Gramsci began to be translated when Cabral was fighting and already in the jungles. Gramsci's first books were translated into Spanish and came out when I myself was in exile.

Now, notice how both men, Cabral and Gramsci, are moved by culture, without, however, neither one nor the other having hyperbolized culture. But this was what practically both did, one writing in jail, an arrested captive, thinking his head off, the other writing in the jungle—as I have no doubt that Amilcar's works, with a few exceptions, for example, his writings from youth, in which he was much more of a poet, were mostly written in the jungle, while fighting.

There were perhaps two types of texts, the ones he wrote for the struggle in the jungle, and those meant for the political fight within the United Nations and in universities. Notice this man's genius, "The liberation struggle is a political struggle for an armed moment, not the other way around." He never said that the struggle for liberation is a war with a few touches of politics. I mean, there are those who think there is never any politics, just bullets, and he says the opposite: It is a clearly political struggle and fight with its armed moments.

And Cabral used both of these moments. He fully lived the substantivity of the struggle. For that reason, he theorized. One day he was in one of the jungles in Guinea-Bissau fighting, and two days later he was receiving the title of Dr. Honoris Causa in one of the universities in the United States and making a speech, as he accepted his doctorate, about the struggle for liberation in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

He would head for the United Nations to fight, and his first great victory was political. He managed to convince the United Nations, and the United Nations convinced the world, that his country was a country occupied by Portugal. The United Nations went there, inside the jungle, in order to rule for independence. That is something extraordinary. Something formidable took place there: Conscientization was brought to the Portuguese army by their losses. There came a point when changes would not have occurred in Portugal, the so-called Carnation Revolution, had there not been a war in Africa. It was the Africans in their jungles who transformed and toppled the Portuguese right. They did it.

What I related in *Cartas a Guiné-Bissau* is true: A Portuguese soldier would come down and stab a pregnant woman. He would shake the fetus up and down and spear it on his bayonet. That was true, true.

One day the people received Soviet instruments, obtained through Cabral's fantastic political acumen; he worked on the Soviet Union well to that end. And as the Portuguese would approach, flying, singing along, they started shooting them down like crazy, those boys from the generation I have discussed here. Each airplane that flew by would come down,

as the boys did not miss a shot. The pilots would no longer go up; they did not want to go, and they had to make an internal change in Portugal.

So, that is why I think a person like Amilcar Cabral should be studied side by side with a person such as Antonio Gramsci. What is the big difference between the two of them? Amilcar died possibly older than Gramsci, and Amilcar had countless years of war in the bush, in the jungle. Conversely, Gramsci was in jail for many years. But I have a conviction that if we study their texts individually or together, it would have enormous importance, and such a study must be undertaken by educators. I think one of the things that is lacking right now for educators is exactly this understanding of education policy and pedagogy.

### *The Inexperience of African Leaderships*

My friends, what did this mean to a lucid leadership? An invasion by European groups, both private and public, and state agencies; they descended upon the airports in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde to bring development proposals after the countries in the region attained autonomy. In their majority, such proposals were not for development in the interest of those independent peoples; rather, they were in the interest of the agencies. They found that the national leaderships were inexperienced, having only had a great deal of experience in fighting war in the jungles, while lacking this other type of experience with diplomacy, with economic debate, and with an understanding of planning in the interest of the people; all of that had to be worked out, including what all this would cost them to countries in international aid terms.

A United Nations *expert* did not go to Guinea-Bissau without being paid six or seven thousand dollars per month, because an *expert* is not a political militant, incidentally, being an expert for that very reason. I don't mean to sabotage anyone; the expert deserves to get paid. But what does that mean from different points of view? It impacts the environment, the politics of the region, local habits. What does all that mean? So that is what I would like to discuss here: The difficulties faced by inexperienced leaderships. We already know how it is not easy; this country of ours here, it is said, became independent on September 7, 1822. That's right, and it remains in extraordinary dependence. It wasn't that long ago that a Chilean woman used to come around once in a while to tell Brasilia how economic development should be done; it wasn't that long ago. So you

might imagine what that is from the standpoint of constructing the autonomy, the independence, and the cultural identity of the African peoples.

## Notes

1. Amilcar Cabral (September 12, 1924–January 20, 1973) was an African agronomic engineer, a writer, a freedom fighter, a Marxist, and a nationalist politician. Cabral led African nationalism movements in Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands and led Guinea-Bissau's independence movement. Guinean natives, who were agents of Portuguese colonialism, assassinated him in 1973, just months before Guinea-Bissau declared unilateral independence. On April 25, 1974, the military dictatorship that had ruled Portugal was overthrown, resulting in independence movements in Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde islands. The struggle for independence was under the leadership of Amilcar Cabral and the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and the Cape Verde islands (PAIGC).
2. Translator's note: Those Africans of Portuguese cultural and linguistic orientations, who were basically the colonized.
3. Translator's note: TuGa is a pejorative term that was used in colonist Africa to refer to the Portuguese, a kind of slur.
4. Translator's note: a Brazilian fictional caricature, a mentally challenged bum, a religious fanatic who prophesizes on the streets. Beato Salu was in a novella, a soap opera actor in Brazil in the 1980s. He was famous for playing as a crazy old man.
5. Cri Cri power was supernatural power or superstitions, and the amulets that were used were called bentinhos.
6. Translator's note: This is a well-known Guevara saying.
7. At this conference, after this idea, Paulo read a letter that he wrote to Mário Cabral in July 1977. This letter appears in a book *Por uma Pedagogia da Pergunta*. Rio de Janerio: Paz e terra, 1985, 127–134. Nita Freire added a footnote to the original Portuguese version of this chapter in the book *Paulo Freire: Pedagogia da Tolerancia*. This volume can be found in "A Paulo Freire Series" of volumes, coordinated by Nita Freire, and published by UNESP.
8. Cf. footnote 3.

   Translators note: In Das Capital, Marx wrote that class struggle was the engine of history, but deconstructionists, postmodernism, and the like have now generalized the class struggle to include race, class, and gender, plus postcolonial revenge against the West.